Beyond the Penumbra

THE Penumbra Review

EDITION #2

Editor's Note

Every edition of this newsletter marks more than just the release of a publication, it marks the continuation of a conversation. Months of writing, editing, debating, and refining have culminated in these pages, each contribution offering its own perspective on the world around us.

Within these pages, we examine the world through distinct lenses, drawing connections between personal experiences and broader conversations that shape our communities. This issue also marks our first collaboration with The Literary Economist, and we're excited to share the result. Bringing together two publications with different voices but the same love for good writing has made this edition all the more rewarding.

To everyone who wrote, edited, illustrated, and supported this issue, thank you. Your dedication has made this publication possible. And to our readers, thank you for continuing to engage with our work. We hope you enjoy this edition and find something within its pages that resonates with you.

As always, thank you for reading,
Talia Ellakany,
Editor-in-Chief & Founder

Table of Contents

4 Freedom Rings Only In Mellow Dreams

5 The Temporary

7 Falls

8 Irony of the Brain

10 Extrasensory Perception: A Concept Between Paranormal Belief and Scientific Inquiry

IN COLLABORATION WITH *THE LITERARY ECONOMIST*

13 Behavioral Economics: How Psychological Factors Affect People's Financial Habits

14 Criminal Charisma: A Gateway Toward Hidden Psychology

freedom rings only in mellow dreams

Amia Frausto

I had a dream.

Where I sat beneath a
flowering dogwood tree.
Atop a luscious green hill on
a torn and tattered picnic blanket.

Underneath a million little
stars shining their endless
hope as far as it could reach.

And in wake of the little stars'
boundless hope, rows and
rows of tulips stretched as
far and as wide as the stars
warming hope allowed them.

Sat beside me was my one
and only friend who could
always understand me.

My adorable little dog who
was as soft and fluffy as the
milky clouds in the soft starry
sky.

I wish I could stay here forever
and always and be as free as
the birds soaring through the
blue summer sky.

But we all know that wishes
never come true and soon I'll
awake again to an achromatic
reality.

The Temporary

Ronyn Kelley

Freely and with wisdom, you have accepted death. Freely and with wisdom, you have reached an end. I have learned very well that you are content with what life is, all the way through its end with withered fingers and blind eyes. Everyone may meet this end. You and I are no exclusions. But currently, you and I sit on a rickety dock. Whole right now.

Years ago, only a day after death, my grandfather met me in my dreams. Sitting in a rocking chair, a similar image to the one that lay in a coffin. Ghostly and pale, now removed of the very little memory I had left of him. I do not remember any premonitions he once shared.

And now, your blind blue eyes sift past my vision and through my memories. They are warm, haunting and trying. Trying to look at me but not making it quite there. These eyes have known me for a long time.

We have each reached and faced our own deaths before the present moment. But now, wistful breezes pass us and a fishing rod lays in its place. The sun shines on the old dock, and we experience it together, we exist in the same world and moment.

Things will not remain the same and I cannot expect them to, but part of me says *"Please do not follow me into my dreams. Please do not be what once was, but stay as you are: right now."*

A fish may be caught and thrown back into the water. The sun will set. Our conversations and words will pass over us like a good day. We are both aware of the circumstances of this meeting and we are both aware of what they mean. We do not acknowledge the liquidity of it all. We do not acknowledge the bad.

. . . *The Temporary* . . .

Acceptance inhabits the air. You look forward to seeing me, and I am the same. Your eyes settle, still trying to see me. Still trying to listen. Still trying to understand. But they do not. They are still blind. They are still looking past me.

We sit on the dock and we fish like today may not be your last. I do not know what to say and these moments are ordinary, I am not drawn to any great conclusions or revelations. There is no cure for you. No answers. We talk about passion and philosophies and I grow closer to you with each passing conversation. The finiteness of it all hangs above me, but we both know letting this show will ruin the moment. And so we do not.

It is a conversation we know will end. And when we are done, I wish you the best. We each lack faith in talking again soon. I do not know what your death will leave of me. I do not know what your illness has made of me, let alone you.

As I am leaving you are content with saying all you said and doing all you did. And one day I will learn from that, learn to embrace the final chapter of my life.

And I know that the moment I look back at you may be my last. And I hope that is enough. And I hope I have done all I could have. And I hope that I will live all that I can. And I hope I will carry you with me.

And as I look back, I see your eyes for just a moment, there's a smile on my face. I turn around just as you tell me you look forward to our next conversation.

I do too.

Goodbye.

Hair

Sahrul Akhbar
"The Rulcifer"

My hands can be anything.
For every hair falling on them,
I could've called them a pair
of mortuaries, after bad times
said, "Let me borrow your life
through your hair" but never returned it
like what my parents did
with the money I got as a kid.

My hands refused
to change themselves
into graveyards,
So I let my hair decay
into dust on the road
or get lost in the city's sewage.

But I've been calling my hands the festival
stages to celebrate how my hair fell
like confetti, after I bestowed myself
more love, brought home more bags
of knowledge and wisdom, and pinned
more memories on my bedroom walls.

For every hair that falls,
and for every hope it carries,
may it be music for the Universe
to dance to, and to answer it joyfully.

Irony Of The Brain

Sara Hamayun

Phineas Gage, a railway construction worker, had zero clue that when he would go to work on September 13th, 1848, an iron rod breaking through his skull would cause a breakthrough in neuroscience and psychology.

The accident had occurred near Cavendish, Vermont. While preparing a blast, Gage thought his assistant had filled the hole with sand so he pressed the 13.5 pound tamping iron into the hole. That caused a spark against the rock and the rod went through his left cheek and out the top of his skull. Almost miraculously, he was not only conscious but could also talk and walk to a cart so he could be taken to a hospital. He was also conscious that evening and could even recall the names of his coworkers.

Gage developed an infection and spent his days in a half-comatose state from September 23rd to October 3rd. He took his first steps out of bed on October 7th . He was treated by Dr John Harlow and much of what researchers know about Phineas' mental condition and intellectual abilities is based on Dr Harlow's words. Dr Harlow noticed that Phineas was able to recall multiple details about the accident and even knew how much time had passed since then but couldn't count money well anymore. Years later when Dr Harlow saw Phineas again, he noted that Phineas had lost eyesight in one of his eyes and had scars from the incident but was overall in good health for a man who had a rod go through his skull.

Before the accident, people say Gage was a nice, hardworking man, but after the accident it seemed he was "no-longer Gage" as the people around Gage called him. He became a heavy drinker and an aggressive man who couldn't keep a job if his life depended on it.

· · · *Irony Of The Brain* · · ·

Due to lack of technology back then, much about Gage's injuries is unknown. However, in 1994 researchers used the remarkable neuroimaging technology to reconstruct his skull. What they found was a possible explanation for Phineas' behavior post accident. They said, most likely, both of his prefrontal cortices had gotten injured, elucidating the problems he had with rationality and controlling his emotions.

After reading Phineas' story, you might wonder, why is he so important? In the mid 1800s, neurology and psychology was still in its infancy period. Phineas Gage's accident and the effects that subsequently came with it, were proof that the frontal lobe was involved in a person's personality.

Phineas Gage, brother, son, uncle and friend of many, despite his tragic accident, became "the man who began neurology". You and I, like so many alike, fell in love with the fields focused on the brain, but never knew the man who became the landmark for it. Today his skull and the tamping iron is residing in the Warren Anatomical Museum at Harvard Medical School, and his legacy is housed in textbooks, articles, research papers and the minds of many people.

Extrasensory Perception:

A Concept Between Paranormal Belief And Scientific Inquiry

Gian Araneta

Extrasensory perception (often shortened as ESP), refers to the concept that people might be able to gain information without using the known physical senses— sight, hearing, touch, taste, or smell. ESP suggests that knowledge might be received through the mind in ways that science cannot prove. Moreover, it is also associated with paranormal studies and is considered part of the broader field of parapsychology. While it is a popular concept in stories, movies, and folklore, its existence remains scientifically unproven.

It is usually classified into several categories: telepathy (the ability to transfer thoughts directly from one mind to another), clairvoyance (the ability to perceive distant events), precognition (the ability to predict future events), as well as psychometry (gaining information about a person or event by touching objects). While these abilities are not supported by established scientific evidence, they still remain widely discussed in paranormal literature, in horror movies, novels, and other forms of entertainment.

Although these ideas are widely discussed in popular culture and have been explored in various experiments, there is no reliable scientific evidence that ESP exists as a real ability. Early studies sometimes reported results that appeared to be slightly above chance, but these findings have not held up under strict scientific testing. Many of the experiments faced criticism due to weak controls, small sample sizes, and difficulties in reproducing results consistently. When more rigorous methods are applied, the evidence for ESP generally disappears, leading most scientists to conclude that it has not been demonstrated in a reliable or measurable way.

Extrasensory Perception: A Concept Between Paranormal Belief And Scientific Inquiry

One of the earliest and most famous experimental attempts to test extrasensory perception was the Zener card experiments conducted in the 1930s by psychologist J. B. Rhine at Duke University. In these tests, participants were asked to guess symbols on cards without seeing them, with the idea that unusually high scores might indicate telepathy or clairvoyance. While some early results appeared slightly above chance, later analyses showed that the findings were inconsistent and often failed to replicate under stricter controls.

Another well-known line of research performed were the Ganzfeld experiments, developed in the 1970s and 1980s. In these studies, participants were placed in a mild sensory deprivation state (such as wearing goggles with soft light and listening to white noise) while another person attempted to "send" images or information telepathically. However, this also had common interpretations of inconsistent findings.

A more modern example often discussed is remote viewing research, particularly experiments funded by the U.S. government during the Cold War, such as the Stargate Project. Participants in the experiment claimed to describe distant locations or hidden targets without physical access. While some demonstrations were considered intriguing at the time, formal evaluations by scientific panels later concluded that the results did not provide reliable evidence for ESP, and the program was eventually discontinued.

Across these different experimental approaches, a common issue was that initial findings sometimes seemed suggestive but failed to remain stable when independently repeated or when stricter controls were introduced. Because of this, most researchers today consider the experimental evidence for ESP to be unconvincing.

In conclusion, extrasensory perception (ESP) remains one of the most debated topics in paranormal and psychological studies. Although experiments such as the Zener card tests, Ganzfeld experiments, and remote viewing studies attempted to provide evidence for abilities like telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition, their results have not been consistently supported under rigorous scientific conditions. Nevertheless, the idea of ESP continues to fascinate people because it reflects humanity's curiosity about the unknown and the possibility of abilities beyond ordinary human perception.

IN COLLABORATION WITH
The Literary Economist

To the reader,

The Literary Economist was created from a longing for slowness. For thought that lingers a little longer. For ideas that move beyond categories and become something softer, stranger, and more human.

This edition, created in collaboration with The Penumbra Review, exists in that spirit.

Inside these pages are reflections shaped by literature, economics, memory, music, art, and the quiet observations that often matter more than conclusions. I have always been drawn to the spaces where academia and art intertwines as its meant to, where analysis does not erase beauty, and where curiosity is allowed to wander freely.

In a world increasingly obsessed with shortcuts and quick results, this edition is made to be felt and sat with instead. The kind of writing that naturally sits with you slowly, like a song you return to years later and somehow understand differently each time.

Nothing here was made to be consumed quickly.

It was made to be felt, questioned, underlined, & revisited.

Thank you for reading.

With love,
Aanchal Vachhani,
Editor-in-Chief, The Literary Economist.

Behavioral Economics

Saranya Bhat

How Psychological Factors Affect People's Financial Habits

Easily described as the key to effective marketing, behavioral economics has come into the spotlight over the past few years and shows no intention of fading away. Combining psychology with traditional economics, it studies how emotions and cognitive biases can influence financial decision-making. Contrary to the old assumption made during the Great Depression, that humans are always rational consumers, behavioral economics argues that people are often guided by impulse, perception, and habit.

Concepts such as loss aversion, anchoring bias, and opportunity cost explain why individuals may overspend during sales, avoid investments due to fear of loss, or remain loyal to familiar brands despite cheaper and effective alternatives. Companies have learned to identify and actively use these habits through targeted advertising, pricing, and personalized recommendations to influence consumers.

The rise of digital platforms and online shopping has further strengthened these patterns. Features such as limited-time offers, subscription offers, and reward systems based on user activity are carefully designed to trigger and use these psychological responses that encourage spending and benefit the producer. Behavioral economics therefore not only explains financial habits but also reveals how modern markets subtly exploit them, making it one of the most relevant fields in understanding consumer behavior today.

Criminal Charisma

A Gateway Toward Hidden Psychology

Upasana Sarma

Have you ever wondered why some dangerous people appear magnetic? Not just with their looks but also with their personality, while overlooking their deeds (karma)?

'Criminal Charisma' is commonly known as the sociopathic phenomenon where individuals (often criminals or serial killers) use charisma, manipulation, refined personality and superficial appeal to attract followers, evade suspicion, or build cults that isolate their followers from the outside world. Society usually trusts attractive people more, largely due to the "halo effect," a cognitive bias where we subconsciously assume that physically beautiful people possess other positive traits like honesty, intelligence, and competence. This unconscious bias stems from deep-rooted psychological, evolutionary, and social factors.

Understanding the Concept: The Halo Effect

Understanding the halo effect helps individuals recognize when they might be making unjustified judgments about someone's character based purely on appearance that might not always be true. Still, The Halo Effect isn't just a random flaw in judgment; it has evolutionary roots. Philosophically and historically, humans associate symmetry, beauty and youthfulness with goodness and health.

At a subconscious level, humans often associate physical attractiveness with health, robust genetics, and vitality. Scientifically, typical or symmetrical faces are often processed more easily by our brains which creates a feeling of familiarity, and humans are inherently wired to trust what feels familiar. Since attractive people are given better first impressions, opportunities, and so on, they often develop higher social confidence. This confidence makes them appear even more dependable and charismatic, further reinforcing the trust placed in them.

Criminal Charisma: A Gateway Toward Hidden Psychology

Often referred to as "pretty privilege" or the "beauty premium", research shows that physically attractive individuals often earn more, negotiate higher salaries, and get hired/promoted more commonly. Employers frequently rate them as more capable and trustworthy during interviews and they receive greater financial opportunities, lighter legal treatment, and even in criminal proceedings, attractive defendants often receive milder sentences.

Confidence & Charisma - Are both the same?

When individuals achieve their goals and fulfill their aspirations and desires, they exude a magnetic energy that draws others toward them. This aura of confidence and charisma often makes them appear more attractive in society. Yet, confidence comes from one's inner personality traits and is not the same as charisma. Charisma is an individual's ability to attract and influence other people. While it is often regarded as a mysterious quality that one either has or doesn't have, some experts argue that the skills of charismatic people can be learned and cultivated over time and are not equivalent to confidence.

Yet, charisma also has a dark side, just like over-confidence. Narcissistic individuals and predators use their charismatic powers and over-confidence to manipulate others. In psychology, manipulation is defined as an action designed to influence or control another person in an underhanded or subtle manner which facilitates one's personal aims. Methods someone may use to manipulate another person may include seduction, suggestion, coercion, mind game, false belief and blackmail. Therefore, although these terms are not the same, both have a link to criminal psychology.

Psychopathy & Its Link Towards Criminal Charm

Psychopathy is a severe personality construct characterized by impaired empathy, a lack of remorse or guilt, superficial charm, and persistent antisocial behavior. Psychopathy focuses on underlying emotional and personal traits rather than just criminal behaviors. Research indicates psychopathy is a neurodevelopmental disorder resulting from a combination of genetic predispositions and environmental factors, such as early childhood trauma or neglect. Studies show that individuals with psychopathy often have structural and functional differences in the amygdala, the area of the brain responsible for processing fear and emotional learning. This may explain the profound deficit in fear reactivity and the inability to internalize social norms.

Criminal Charisma: A Gateway Toward Hidden Psychology

'Hybristophilia', another keyword which relates to Criminal Charisma, is a psychological condition where an individual experiences romantic or sexual attraction to people who have committed atrocious or violent crimes, such as serial killers or rapists. The term was first coined by sexologist John Money in 1986. It is sometimes referred to as "Bonnie and Clyde syndrome." The phenomenon is of two types: Passive Hybristophilia and Aggressive Hybristophilia.

1. Passive Hybristophilia: The attraction remains purely on the idea of the criminal. Individuals with this type often obsess over infamous offenders, send them love letters, attend their trials, or even marry them in prison.
2. Aggressive Hybristophilia: A rarer and more dangerous manifestation where the person becomes an active accomplice. They may directly assist in the violent acts, help the criminal evade law enforcement, or provide support in covering up the crimes.

Psychologists and researchers who study the hybristophilia phenomenon observe a few common threads underlying this attraction:

- *The "Rescuer" Complex:* Many individuals believe they are the only ones who can "fix" the criminal, or that their love is capable of healing deep-rooted childhood trauma.
- *Safety and Control:* Some individuals are drawn to the immense, undeniable power, charm, and dominance exhibited by the offender. By aligning with a violent person, they might subconsciously feel protected, avoiding the risk of becoming a victim themselves.
- *The Thrill of Danger:* The transgressive nature of the relationship offers an extreme adrenaline rush, allowing the individual to experience the notoriety and danger of the criminal lifestyle from a somewhat controlled distance.
- *Trauma and Self-Esteem:* Many documented cases involve individuals with a history of childhood abuse, abandonment, or low self-esteem, leading them to seek out high-risk, non-traditional, or entirely one-sided relationships.

'Criminal Charisma' is not just one term that can capture the essence of criminal psychology. Under this, it has the 'halo effect', 'pretty privilege', charm, manipulation, refined personality, 'the art of seduction', coercion, mind game, false belief, blackmail, 'psychopathy' and connections to psychological conditions like 'hybristophilia'. The effects these conditions have on individuals in our society are truly difficult to comprehend and have many unexplored facets. Ultimately, this is why spreading awareness of these unconventional and lesser-known terms really aids in fueling a brighter future for all.

Chime

The candle flame has silenced, the incense burned. The themes and motifs in this edition share an essence of spiritedness and vitality; an infusion of fresh perspectives and meaningful insight for the mind, creating a haze of new understandings.

This edition monumentalizes its contributors' willingness to explore the shadows of our society and life. It shows that importance lingers beyond the spotlight, and that the allure of discovery hides even in the creases and shadows of life. Ever since the beginning of The Penumbra Review, a hope to unveil what lies beyond the limelight has dwelled within us, and we're incredibly grateful to be able to pass on this sentiment and these principles with a second edition of "Beyond the Penumbra."

In collaboration with The Literary Economist, we've curated a selection of literary works which focus on psychological and economical elements deeply ingrained in personal experiences, habits, and morals. Our contributing authors discuss topics from behavioral economics to social factors in finance and so on. Ultimately, this edition captures a widespread curiosity for the unknown; in a way, serving as a ritual of inspiration and shared knowledge.

Until next time,
Lucas Gladun,
Co-Editor-In-Chief

Thank you for reading!

THE Penumbra Review

Beyond the Penumbra

graphic design and 3d renders by Lucas Gladun